

The Best of Rutland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

20th – 23rd June 2025



Ospreys



Elephant Hawk-moth



Wasp Orchid



Silver-washed Fritillary

Tour report by Matthew Capper



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Summary

Based in the centre of Oakham, Rutland's diminutive county town, we spent a happy few days touring a range of sites in fabulous summer weather. The days were studded with various butterflies, orchids and Rutland's famous Ospreys.

Highlights included Purple Emperor and Black Hairstreak butterflies, Lizard and Wasp Orchids, and a happy morning inspecting the moth traps at Tim Appleton's fabulous cottage on the shore of Rutland Water. We also got the chance to see some of the area's non-biological sights, with stops at some of the local landmarks including Oakham Castle and Burghley House.

Day 1

Friday 20th June

We assembled in the foyer of the Wisteria Hotel in the early evening for our first meal, and had a chance to make introductions to each other and preview the forthcoming trip. It was great to have a group who had not visited the area before, and were eager to explore.

Day 2

Saturday 21st June

For those who wanted to start early, there was a pre-breakfast excursion down to Rutland Water, and arguably the best back garden in the country. Tim Appleton used to manage the nature reserve here, and despite being busy with the run-up to the Global Birdfair, he had kindly invited us round to enjoy a range of birds with a welcome hot drink.

The star was our first Osprey of the trip, fishing close by, but a range of other species were on show too: a pair of Oystercatcher on a nest, egrets, Grey Herons and Cormorants in the nearby heronry, and a range of ducks out on the water. Stock Doves are always smart birds, especially in bright sunshine, and the bird of prey list was completed by a Buzzard and quartering Red Kite.

With breakfast out of the way, we drove to Fermyn Woods to look for butterflies. The dry spring had clearly made this a good year for butterflies, and it didn't take long for us to start finding some. There were Large Skippers, Ringlets and Meadow Browns in the grassy margins, and we soon found the first of several Silver-washed Fritillaries. Our main target, however, was Purple Emperor, and given patience we added a couple of brief but conclusive views. Sadly, the butterfly wasn't in the mood for landing on the track, and sped off as quickly as it had appeared.

Our next stop was Glapthorn Cow Pasture, just a fifteen-minute drive away. This site is famous for Black Hairstreak, a species that was once restricted to just a handful of sites between Oxford and Peterborough, but has in recent years started rapidly to expand its range. This trip is timed to coincide with their peak flight time, but this year, they had already been on the wing for several weeks. We bumped into a group who had been searching without success, and headed to the centre of the site and an area with a large patch of Dewberry, where the hairstreaks are known to come down from the canopy, especially during the middle of the day.

It took around twenty minutes, but our patience was rewarded when a single Black Hairstreak fluttered down and settled on a flower, completely unperturbed by our presence. Photos were taken and we had as much time as we wanted to enjoy what was a new butterfly for several in the group.



Black Hairstreak



Six-spot Burnet

It was now rather late, and we were overdue lunch. Burghley House, on the edge of Stamford, made an excellent stop for a sandwich and a chance to have a look at one of the finest Elizabethan houses in the country.

We were packing in the sites today, and our next was Swaddyswell Pit. The orchids here can be superb, but we were struggling a little today, as the hot, dry spring and summer meant they were either already over, or just hadn't bothered growing in the first place! A few Bee Orchids were still in bloom, but an example of the rare *bicolor* variety was just a crispy husk. The Pyramidal Orchids were looking good, however, and there were a few nice limestone flowers, such as Common Centaury, Common Rockrose and Yellow Wort.

Barnack Hills and Hols was in a similar state. The Chalk Fragrant Orchids were going over, and there was no sign of a Man Orchid. Sadly, this is a site that has suffered from too much disturbance, and Natural England have taken the decision to rope off many of the best areas. However, there was still some interest in the form of plentiful Knapweed Broomrape and Clustered Bellflower.

We decided to drive back to the hotel via Stamford. The centre of the town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and holds a large proportion of Lincolnshire's listed buildings. It was something of a whistle-stop tour, but enough to whet the appetite.

Day 3

Sunday 22nd June

Two hardy souls joined Matthew for the pre-breakfast outing. We were going to head to Barnsdale, but the road had been temporarily closed. This actually turned out to be for the best. We diverted to drive round some nearby fields in the hope of finding a Grey Partridge. We didn't see any of these, but it was Hare heaven, and we racked up around a dozen over the next quarter of an hour. There were also a couple of Egyptian Geese, prompting a discussion about why they are the leader's least-favourite bird.

There was still time for a bit of a walk, and we chose to head to Green Bank, which gives a great view of South Arm III of the reservoir. The 'tunnel' through the woodland was rather special, with birds singing all around us. We identified Wren, Song Thrush, Cetti's Warbler and a sing off between two Garden Warblers.

On the reservoir there were over a hundred Mute Swans, and plenty of Gadwalls, Great Crested Grebes, Mallards and Tufted Ducks. An Osprey was fishing, hovering repeatedly as it searched for a suitable fish. And in the distance we picked up a Peregrine, which swooped closer before dropping in to a tree in the woodland in front of us. It was perched directly below a Great Egret, and was soon joined by the Osprey nearby. They all allowed for extended telescope views, and certainly made the morning for those who were there.

We returned for breakfast and then headed back to Tim's cottage, where we had run a couple of moth traps overnight. There is something approaching the feeling of Christmas morning when you peer into a trap to see what you've caught, and the warm calm night had led to a bumper catch. We spent a happy couple of hours receiving a master class from our expert Eric in the art of moth identification. We didn't have time to go through some of the trickier ones, but still amassed an impressive list. It contained multiple hawk-moths and at least thirty Scarlet Tigers.

We thanked Eric and reluctantly left Tim's in order to spend the rest of the day on the reserve, starting with the visitor centre at Egleton. A Hobby was hawking over Lagoon One and provided excellent views. We wandered on to Lagoon Four, where a pair of Ospreys had formed a late-season bond and were now building a nest. The male was perched on the ground with a half-eaten fish, which a Carrion Crow was eyeing up. We couldn't find the reported Little Ringed Plover, but did add Avocet among the Lapwing. More wildfowl were added to our list, in the form of Teal and Pochard. On Lagoon Three, there were breeding Black-headed Gulls, and Sedge and Reed Warblers in the reeds. On the far side, a pair of Marsh Harriers were hunting.

We walked to Lapwing Hide to view the main lake. Sometimes, Otters can be seen along the edge, but not today. So, we retraced our steps and made our way to Lagoon Two, where hundreds of Sand Martin were swooping in and out of the artificial nesting bank.

On the way, we spotted a sign pointing out our rarest sighting of the weekend: Willow Blister Fungus. This is one of the world's most threatened species and the discovery at Rutland Water was only the second record ever in England, and first since 1876.

It hadn't been nearly as hot as on Saturday, but it had still been warm enough, so we took advantage of the visitor centre and had a welcome ice cream. We still had a little time to spare, but the sightings from the other side of the reserve were not enough to tempt us, so we drove back to Oakham and gave everyone the chance to have a wander around the Norman castle in the centre of town. It is still customary for visiting royalty and peers of the realm to forfeit a horseshoe to the lord of the manor, and the ferrous offerings hang on the castle walls, making for an impressive sight.

Day 4

Monday 23rd June

For our final day, we opted for an earlier breakfast and no early excursion. We would need the extra time to get round all our sites. After picking up some sandwiches for lunch, we made our way round to the Lyndon reserve at Rutland Water, and received a warm welcome from the staff and volunteers.

There were a few butterflies on the wing as we made our way down to the track, mostly Comma and Speckled Wood, and we put in some time trying to find an Otter, following earlier reports. We had no, luck but there were plenty of birds to see: Cormorants in a dead tree, a family of Mute Swans, and plenty of egrets.

As we approached the Osprey hide, we spotted a patch of Willow Blister Fungus and Matthew subsequently ascertained that it had not been recorded here before. It isn't every day you add a new site for such a rare species! The family of Ospreys were all present, although it took a few minutes to spot that the male perched close by. The female was keeping a close guard on her four recently-ringed chicks; so we knew there were two males and two females. At one point the female took off, did a quick circuit and dropped down to the lake, dragging her talons and flying back to the nest with a stick.

We returned to the centre and ate our packed lunches, and then headed off for the final couple of stops of the trip. First up was Bloody Oaks nature reserve. Here, there were Marbled Whites and Dark Green Fritillaries flitting low over the grass. With the warmth, they were seldom still for long though. Our star species here was Wasp Orchid, a rare form of Bee Orchid.



Lizard Orchid



Pyramidal Orchid

A short drive away was Robert's Field. This place has an interesting history having been one of the best meadows in Lincolnshire, before it was largely destroyed, and then restored by the Wildlife Trust back in the 1990s. There were plenty of Pyramidal and Common Spotted Orchids, along with some excellent Knapweed Broomrapes, but the real highlight was a Lizard Orchid. It had only been found this year, and was the first in Lincolnshire for maybe fifty or sixty years.

With that, it was time to head back to the hotel, to say our final farewells, and to reflect on a fabulous few days in and around England's smallest county.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I - introduced		June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	21	22	23
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓		

I - introduced		June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	21	22	23
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓		✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓		✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓	
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	✓	✓	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓		✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓		✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓		✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓		
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	

Mammals

I = introduced		June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	21	22	23
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓		

Butterflies

		June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	21	22	23
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	✓		✓
Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>			✓
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓	✓
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	
Black Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium pruni</i>	✓		

Common name	Scientific name	June 2025		
		21	22	23
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	✓		
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>			✓
Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura iris</i>	✓		
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	✓		
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	✓	✓	✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓		
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓		✓
Common Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	✓		✓
Common Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓

Moths

Common name	Scientific name	June 2025		
		21	22	23
Willow Ermine	<i>Yponomeuta rorella</i>		✓	
Green Oak Tortrix	<i>Tortrix viridana</i>		✓	
Bramble Shoot	<i>Notocelia uddmanniana</i>		✓	
Leopard Moth	<i>Zeuzera pyrina</i>		✓	
Six-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>			✓
Mother of Pearl	<i>Patania ruralis</i>		✓	
Brown China-mark	<i>Elophila nymphaeata</i>		✓	
Water Veneer	<i>Acentria ephemerella</i>		✓	
Peach Blossom	<i>Thyatira batis</i>		✓	
Lackey	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>		✓	
Eyed Hawk-moth	<i>Smerinthus ocellatus</i>		✓	
Poplar Hawk-moth	<i>Laothoe populi</i>		✓	
Elephant Hawk-moth	<i>Deilephila elpenor</i>		✓	
Riband Wave	<i>Idaea aversata</i>		✓	
Barred Straw	<i>Gandaritis pyraliata</i>		✓	
Sandy Carpet	<i>Ourapteryx sambucaria</i>		✓	
Green Pug	<i>Pasiphila rectangulata</i>		✓	
Brimstone Moth	<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>		✓	
Swallow-tailed Moth	<i>Ourapteryx sambucaria</i>		✓	
Peppered Moth	<i>Biston betularia</i>		✓	
Willow Beauty	<i>Peribatodes rhomboidaria</i>		✓	
Common White Wave	<i>Cabera pusaria</i>		✓	
Clouded Silver	<i>Lomographa temerata</i>		✓	
Light Emerald	<i>Campaea margaritaria</i>		✓	
Common Emerald	<i>Hemithea aestivaria</i>		✓	
Buff-tip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>		✓	
Straw Dot	<i>Rivula sericealis</i>		✓	
Black Arches	<i>Lymantria monacha</i>		✓	
Brown-tail	<i>Euproctis chrysorrhoea</i>		✓	
Ruby Tiger	<i>Phragmatobia fuliginosa</i>		✓	
Scarlet Tiger	<i>Callimorpha dominula</i>		✓	
Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	✓	✓	
Red-necked Footman	<i>Atolmis rubricollis</i>		✓	
Scarce Footman	<i>Eilema complana</i>		✓	
Beautiful Hook-tip	<i>Laspeyria flexula</i>		✓	

Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>	✓		
Spectacle	<i>Abrostola tripartita</i>		✓	
Burnished Brass	<i>Diachrysia chrysitis</i>		✓	
Beautiful Golden Y	<i>Autographa pulchrina</i>		✓	
Coronet	<i>Craniophora ligustri</i>		✓	
Dark Arches	<i>Apamea monoglyphica</i>		✓	
Dun-bar	<i>Cosmia trapezina</i>		✓	
Smoky Wainscot	<i>Mythimna impura</i>		✓	
Heart and Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>		✓	
Flame	<i>Axylia putris</i>		✓	
Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochropleura plecta</i>		✓	
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>		✓	

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name	June		
		21	22	23
Lesser Stag Beetle	<i>Dorcus parallelipipedus</i>	✓		
Spotted Longhorn Beetle	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>	✓		
Hawthorn Shieldbug	<i>Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale</i>	✓		
Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>	✓		

Orchids

Scientific name	English name
<i>Orchis mascula</i>	Early Purple Orchid
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Pyramidal Orchid
<i>Himantoglossum hircinum</i>	Lizard Orchid
<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>	Chalk Fragrant Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i>	Southern Marsh Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza</i> × <i>grandis</i>	Southern Marsh / Common Spotted hybrids
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Bee Orchid
<i>Ophrys apifera</i> var. <i>trollii</i>	Wasp Orchid
<i>Ophrys apifera</i> var. <i>bicolor</i>	Bicoloured Bee Orchid

Selected other plants

Scientific name	English name
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Common Rockrose
<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>	Dropwort
<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	Agrimony
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild Carrot
<i>Pastinaca sativa</i>	Wild Parsnip
<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	Common Mallow
<i>Althaea officinalis</i>	Marsh Mallow
<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>	Hairy St John's Wort
<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>	Great Bird's-foot Trefoil
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common Bird's-foot Trefoil
<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	Woody Nightshade
<i>Thymus serpyllum</i>	Wild Thyme
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Field Bindweed
<i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i>	Yellow Wort

Scientific name	English name
<i>Centaurium erythraea</i>	Common Centaury
<i>Verbascum nigrum</i>	Dark Mullein
<i>Galium mollugo</i>	Hedge Bedstraw
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's Bedstraw
<i>Campanula glomerata</i>	Clustered Bellflower
<i>Orobancha elatior</i>	Knapweed Broomrape
<i>Centaurea jacea</i>	Brown Knapweed
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Black Knapweed
<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	Ragwort
<i>Pulsatilla vulgaris</i>	Pasque Flower